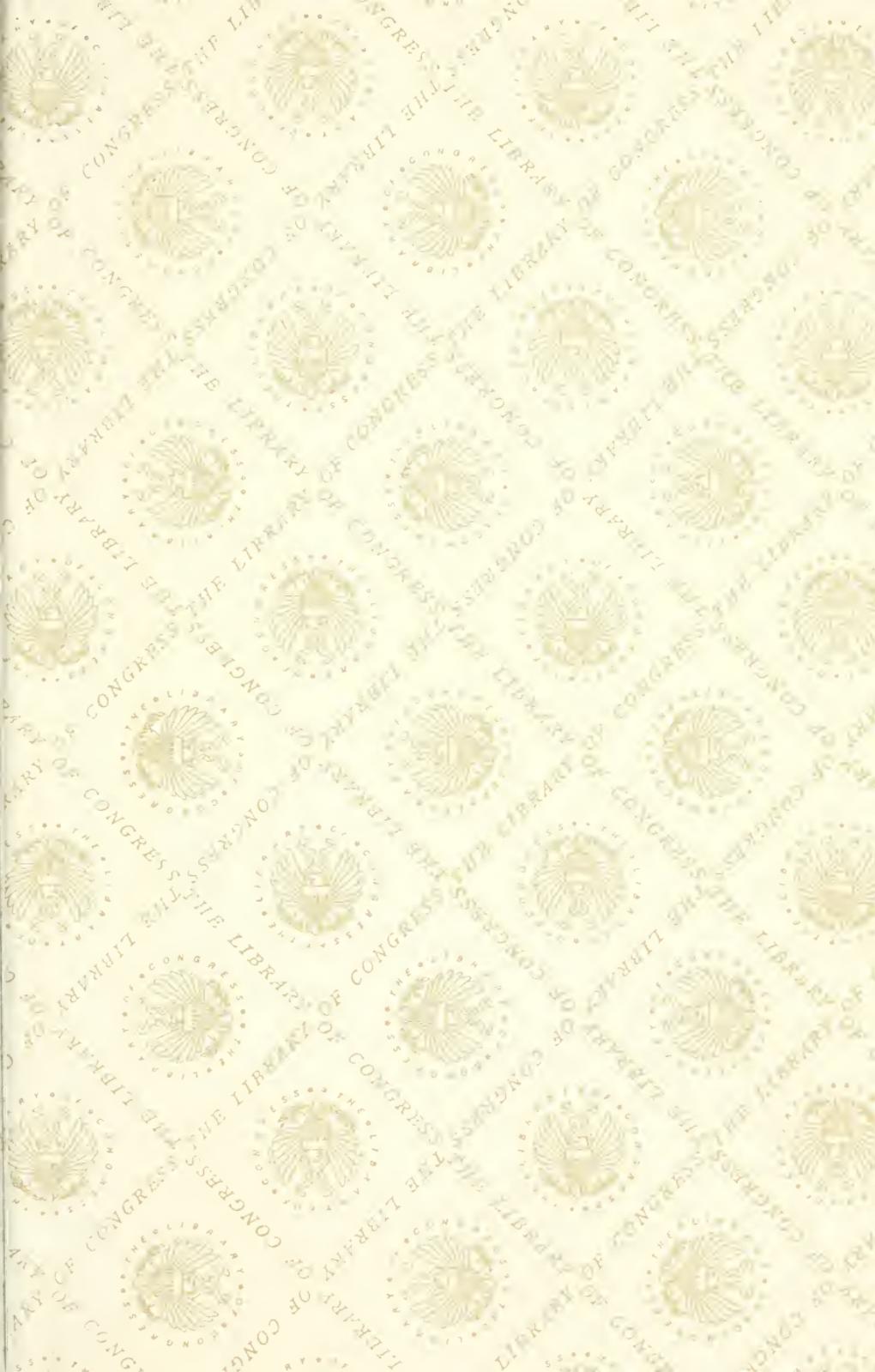
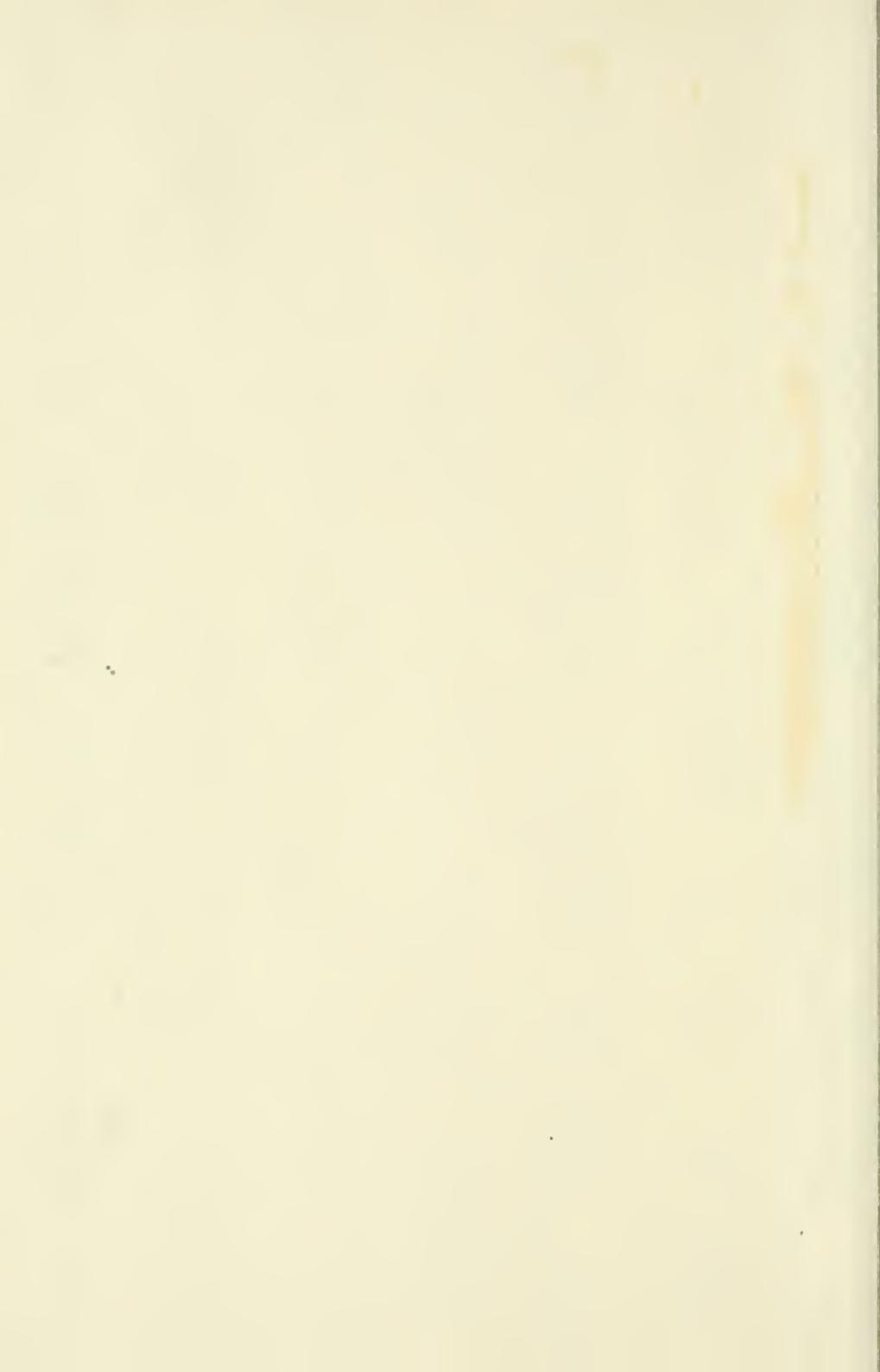


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The Story of the “Old Stone Chimney”

by Peter A. Porter



AS RE-ERECTED ON ITS PRESENT SITE

NIAGARA FALLS, N. Y.

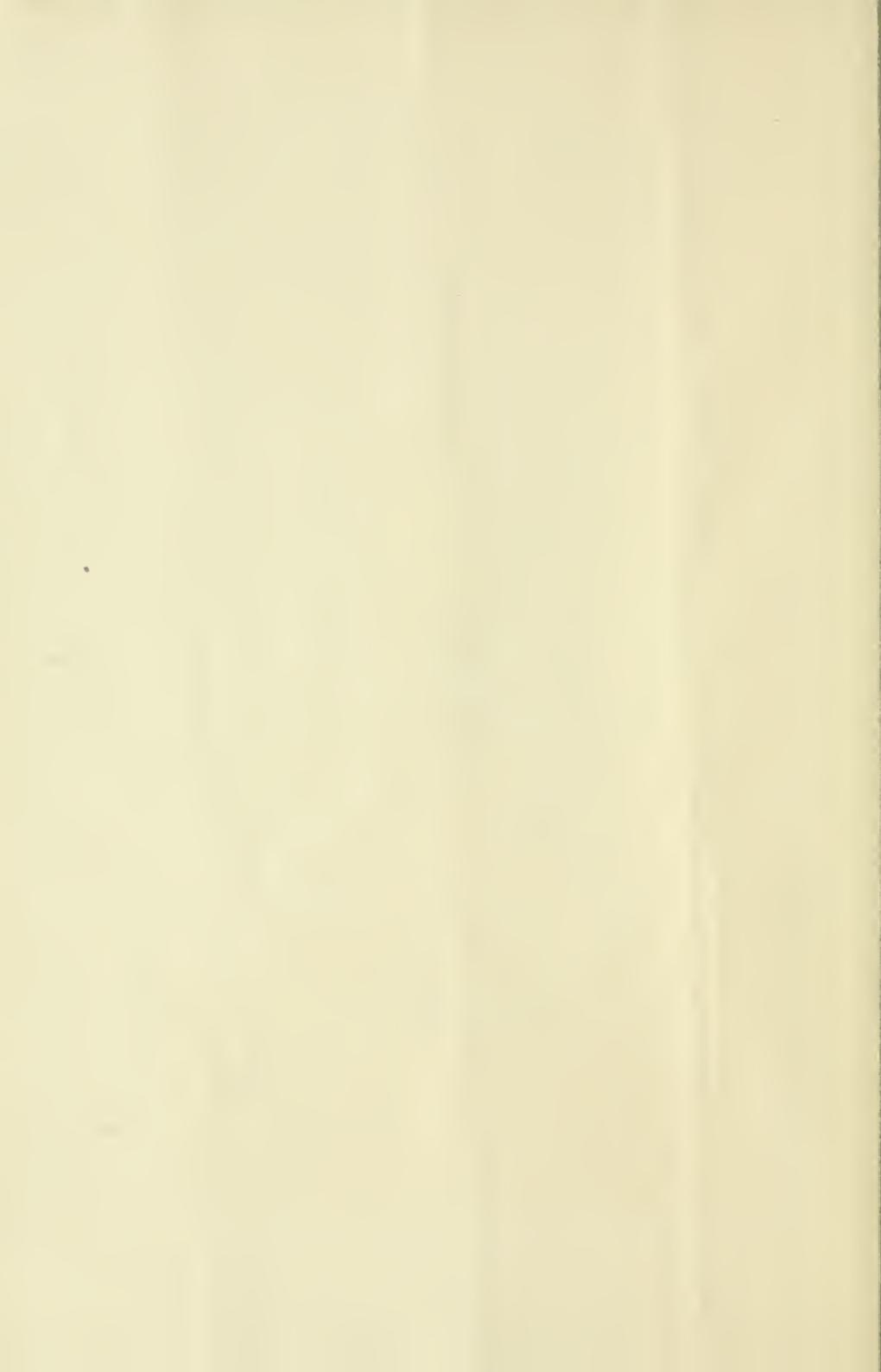
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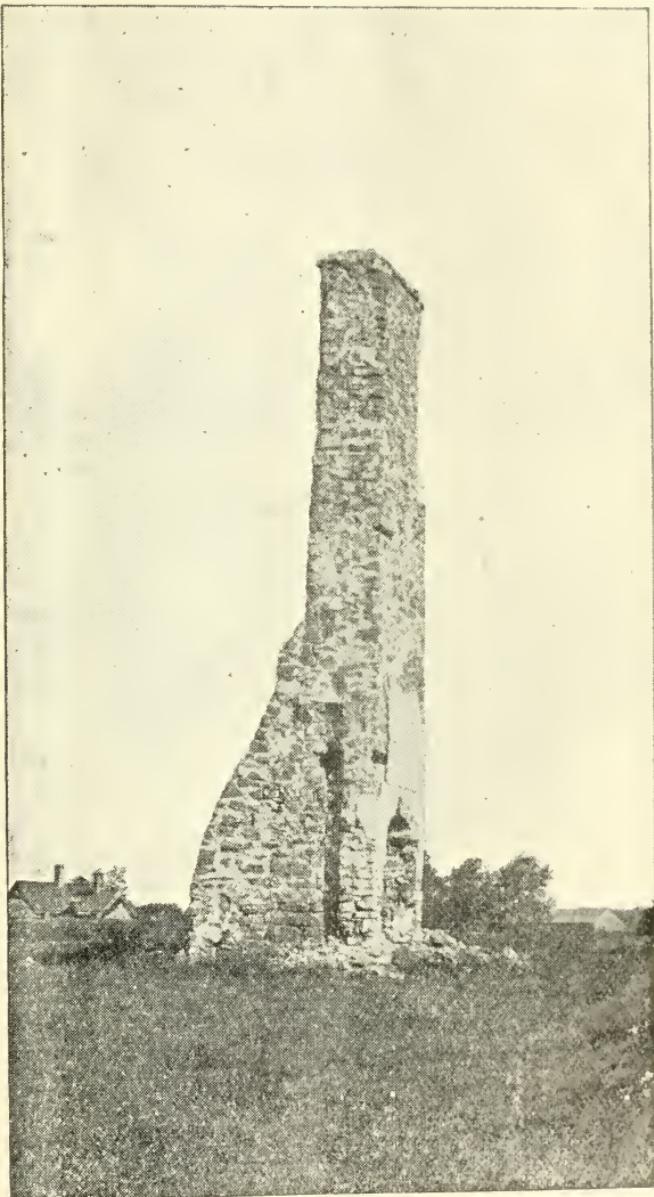
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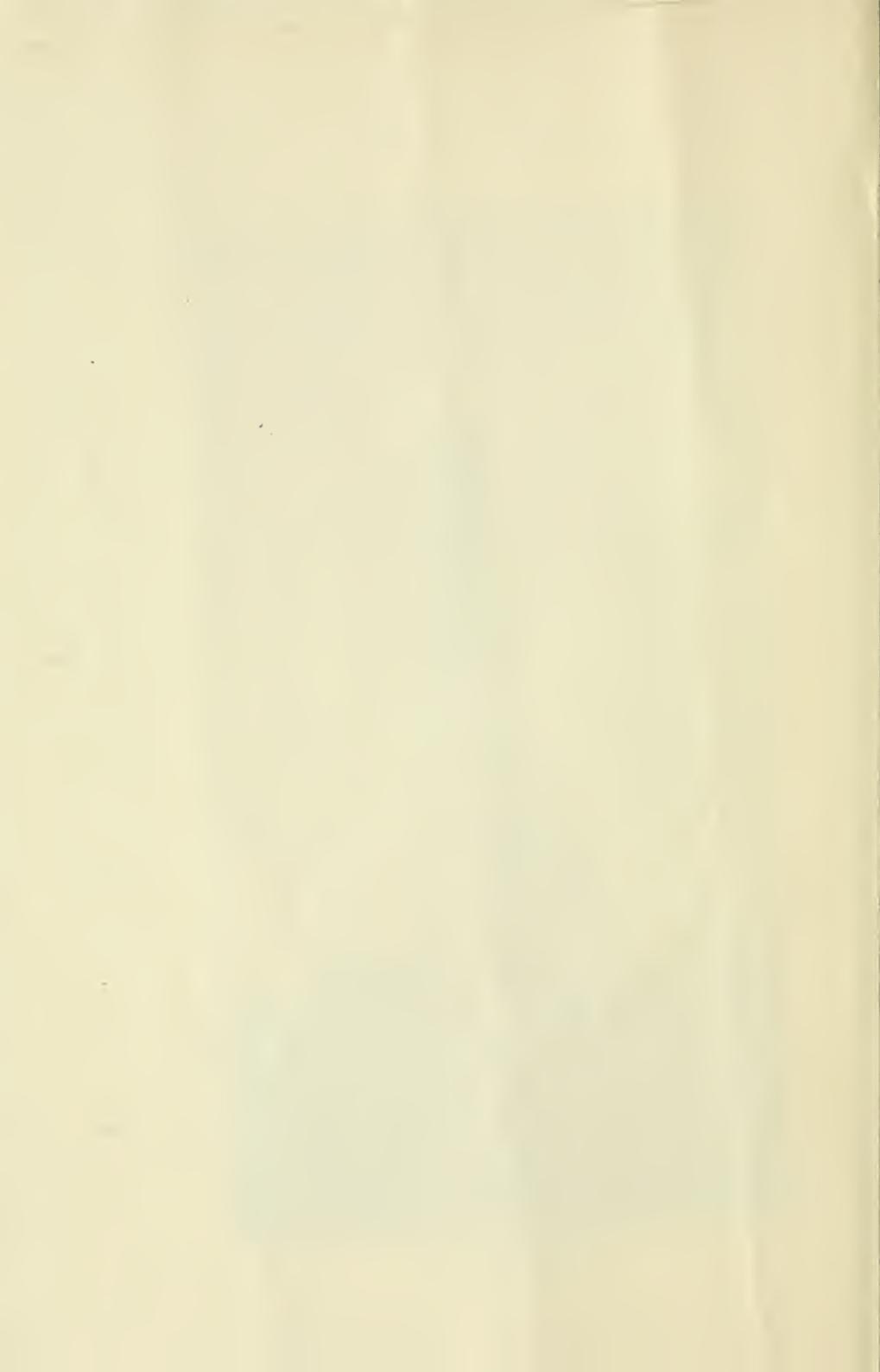
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ON ORIGINAL SITE



NIAGARA'S "OLD STONE CHIMNEY"

BY

PETER A. PORTER

Niagara Falls, N. Y., September 1, 1915

THE Niagara Frontier Historical Society has recently expressed its appreciation of the fact that we still have in our midst an historical relic which dates back to the days when the flag bearing the Lilies of France controlled the destinies of all this region; by placing upon it a tablet which summarizes its history.

If there is any structure within our goodly City, which deserved to be marked for perpetuity, surely it was this old, so-called, Fort Schlosser Chimney: although it ante-dates that Fort by full ten years.

It is not only the most ancient masonry within our City limits, but, with the exception of the "Castle" at Fort Niagara, which was completed in 1727, it is the oldest masonry on the Frontier, and further yet, with the same exception, it is the oldest masonry in the State of New York, west of Albany.

It originally stood to the west of the British Portage Road; today, in its reconstructed form, it stands some 150 feet farther eastward, and exactly in the line of that ancient high-way.

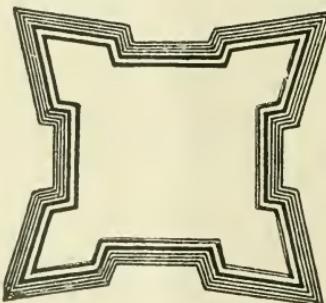
The river shore used to be very much nearer to it than it is today, for considerable new land was made by filling in with the rock taken out when the great tunnel was constructed.

When the first white man saw the Falls, an Indian trail around them, seven miles in length and extending from the upper to the lower river, had existed for many, perhaps many hundreds of years.

The French used it during the entire period of their occupation of this region, but never improved it to any extent; all their portaging being done on men's shoulders, a goodly number of Indians being thus constantly employed.

Starting from the lower river, that trail ran up the gully, which still exists at the foot of the Lewiston Mountain; thence it crept up the side of the cliff, even as it does today and then followed the present road until it reached Schoelkopf Park, in the City of Niagara Falls; thence it ran in a straight line to a point just above the intake of the Hydraulic Canal. There, the spot has always been called the "Frenchmen's Landing", and has recently been transformed into a City Park, the French built a small stone Block House, in 1745, which was known as the First Fort Little Niagara.

Five years later, their increasing commerce with the west demanded larger boats in order to allow of larger cargoes, and the swift current at this point made it too dangerous for the landing of the heavy and heavily laden boats.



PLAN OF SECOND FORT LITTLE NIAGARA, 1750

So they built a larger Fort, half a mile up stream, making that the terminus of the trail, or portage, and carried that road up stream, along the bank, to it.

Then, in 1750, this Chimney was built. It was not in that Fort, but some rods below it, and adjoined the Barracks and Mess House; the lime for its mortar being "portaged" from Lewiston.

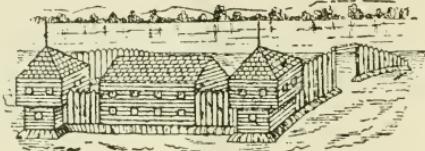
There is no known picture of that structure, but it was a two story log building. That is proven by the fireplace for the second story, which was plainly visible in this Chimney; this was closed up, when a new structure was built to it in 1840, and the stone arch of that upper fire-place, formed of the identical stones, has been exactly reproduced in the rebuilt Chimney. That French fort stood until 1759, Chabert Joncaire being its commander. In that year Britain finally began the long-projected campaign which was to result in driving France from the North American Continent.

This Fort, called Fort du Portage, or Second Little Niagara, was merely a dependency of Fort Niagara, and when Britian laid siege to the larger fort, the French burned this dependency, in order to prevent its falling into the hands of the British. It was a small but regular fort with bastioned earth-works surrounded by palisades, its buildings being constructed of logs.

When the French troops from the west, accompanied by their Indian allies, who were hastening to the defense of Fort Niagara, reached this fort, nothing but its earth works, and this chimney remained. The British soon captured Fort Niagara, and thus became the controllers, and five years later, through deeds from the Senecas, the actual owners of the famous Niagara Portage. They realized the imperative need of a fort at the upper end of the Portage, and Captain Schlosser, a German serving in the British army, was ordered to construct it.

He did so in 1760, erecting three block houses of logs, and connecting them with each other by palisades.

which also extended to the river, its site being above the old chimney, but nearer to it than the destroyed French fort. It was named Fort Schlosser, after him.



FORT SCHLOSSER, 1762

He had found in Fort Niagara the frame work for a Chapel, which the French had prepared. He had it carried over the old Portage, piece by piece, and re-erected, belfry and all, alongside the old chimney, for use as a barracks and mess house, but this time for British troops.

One Duncan secured a lease of a part of the building for use as a "trading post;" and on some early maps, the site is marked, "Duncan's." Bitter protests were made against his "monopoly" in an army building, and the lease was soon cancelled.

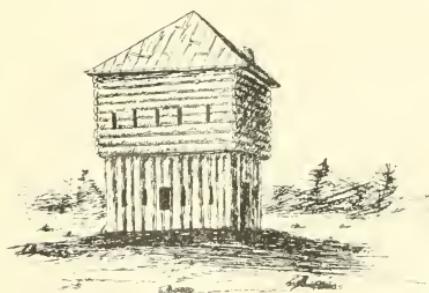
In 1760 General Gage, the British commander out here, gave one John Stedman a contract to improve the Portage road, or old trail, between Lewiston and Fort Schlosser: It was to be widened and made passable for wagon traffic from the lower river as far as Schoelkopf Park in this city. From that point a new piece of road was to be constructed direct to Fort Schlosser and that new piece, about a mile in length, is today officially known as "Portage Road."

Stedman finished his contract in 1763, and on the first return train over it to Fort Niagara, the Senecas ambushed it at the "Devil's Hole." They were incensed at Britain, because of her intention to benefit transportation over the Portage by the use of ox-carts, thus depriving them of their long continued employ-

ment as "carriers," and were ready to listen to Pontiac's urging to join his "Confederacy" against Britain. Stedman, on horse-back led that train, which consisted of about a dozen carts drawn by oxen, their teamsters and 24 soldiers as an escort. Of them only two men, (Stedman one of them) and a drummer boy escaped. A savage seized the bridle of Stedman's horse. He drove his knife through that Seneca's hand, slashed the bridle, put spurs to his horse and fled back to Fort Schlosser.

Four months later, when the Senecas sued for forgiveness for that massacre, Sir Wm. Johnson agreed, on condition that the Senecas deed to Britain the lands on both sides of the Niagara River from Lake Ontario to some two miles above the Falls on the American side, and to some distance above them on the Canada shore;— thus including the entire Niagara Portage.

The Senecas accepted and in 1764, not only gave the deed, but under compulsion of the presence of a British army, also included all the lands on both shores clear to Lake Erie.



BLOCK HOUSE ON PORTAGE ROAD, 1764

The need of absolute protection for this famous Portage had already led Britain to erect, in 1764, eleven Block Houses along it some 1200 yards apart.

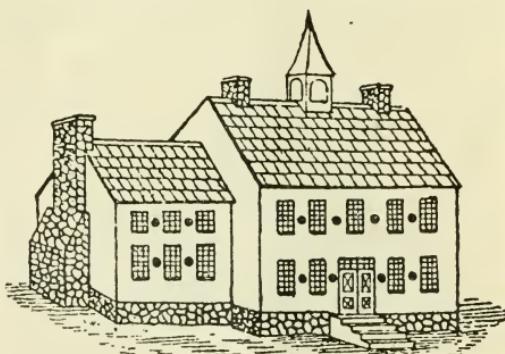
With Fort Schlosser guarding its upper end, with those block houses along it, and with the fort at Lewiston, it was the best protected highway in all North America.



LOG WORK ON PORTAGE ROAD, 1764

Britain held our American Niagara Frontier by ownership until the close of the Revolution, and by occupation from 1783 to 1796, known in history as "The Hold-Over Period."

John Stedman was the master of the Portage from 1760 until 1796 and made his headquarters in the house Capt. Schlosser had built and it came to be universally known as "Stedman's House. It was a



STEDMAN HOUSE

square two story building, with a square two story wing, which latter adjoined this chimney; and both stories in both parts were loop-holed for musketry;

it was a miniature fort in itself. In it, during that long period, he entertained every prominent person who crossed the Portage, reserving a special brand of "toddy" for their refreshment.

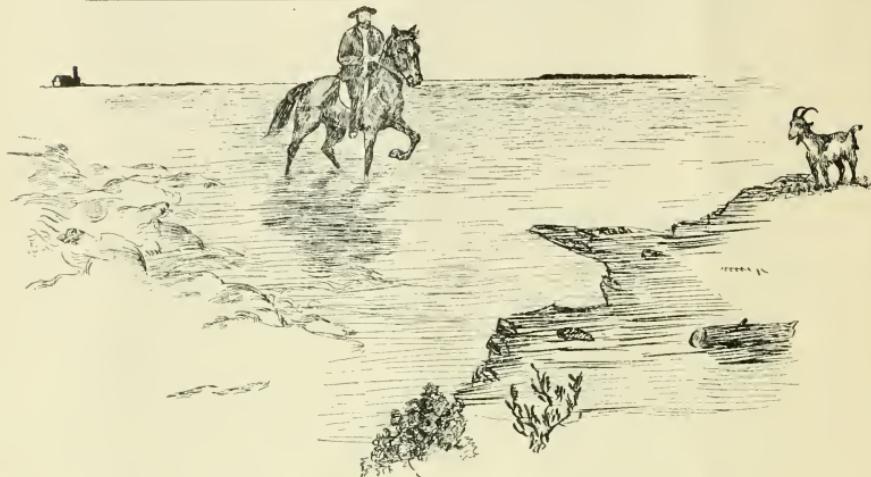
Before that Chimney's fireplace messed the officers of Fort Schlosser, and the officers of all the frequently passing British troops; before it dined also the many "traders," who were large users of the Portage, both going west and coming east; and before its blazing fire numberless Indian chiefs and "braves" ate their fill, drank more than that, and then laid them down on the kitchen floor to sleep, perchance to dream of future "drunks" and of future deviltry.

John Stedman was the owner of the famous Billy Goat, from which the Island which separates the two Falls, derived its name. He used to keep a flock of goats on it, and during the exceptionally severe winter of 1779-80, the entire flock perished, save only that one male goat. He is said to have gotten them over to the Island, one at a time, in canoes, selecting the Island because it was inaccessible to the wolves, which were very numerous hereabouts in those days.

Stedman never made any claim to the Island's ownership. He knew that the Senecas had presented it, together with all the other islands in the river to Sir Wm. Johnson in 1764 and that Sir William had immediately turned it over to the British Crown. Stedman is credited with preferring to reach Goat Island, from his home, by horse-back, rather than by canoe. He would ride down to the New City Park at the 10 Rod Strip, and then swim his horse across the channel to the shallow bar which still extends far up stream from the Island's eastern or upper end.

When he removed to Canada, in 1796, he then, for the first time set up a claim to the ownership of some 5,000 acres of land, which he said the Senecas had given him in 1763, because they believed the

Great Spirit had purposely saved his life at the Devil's Hole Massacre. The land he claimed embraced all that lying west of the Portage Road, over



STEDMAN RIDING TO GOAT ISLAND

which he had fled to safety, and between that and the Niagara River, from Fort Schlosser to the Devil's Hole. That claim covered the larger part of the present City of Niagara Falls, to-day worth many millions. It was a perfectly fraudulent claim. The Senecas had deeded all that land to Britain in 1764, he had never mentioned the claim before 1796, he said he had given the deed to Sir William Johnson for safe keeping, (but Sir William himself had bought all that land for Britain in 1764) and that the deed was destroyed when Sir William's house was burnt; and he never mentioned his claim until long after Sir William's death. He left Jesse Ware in the "Stedman House" to hold possession and to prosecute that claim. The Courts decided against him and in 1804, Ware was ejected.

In 1805, the State of New York leased the Niagara Portage, under competitive bids, to the firm of Porter,

Barton & Co. Augustus Porter, one of that firm lived in the Stedman House from 1806 to 1808. Then Enos Broughton leased it for a Tavern, he made it the center of activities of the region, and there the "General Trainings" were held.

The first instance of an Indian Tribe offering aid in war to the United States, was when the declaration of the war of '12, reached this frontier, and 100 of the Tuscaroras from the reservation near Lewiston, headed by their Chief John Mount Pleasant, hurried to Fort Niagara for that purpose,—suggesting that they be allowed to garrison and defend Fort Schlosser. The War of '12, of course put an end to the Portage business during its duration. Broughton's Tavern became again a mess house, this time for the United States officers in Fort Schlosser. During that war the British did not reach Fort Schlosser until July 4, 1813, when a party from Chippewa made a dash on it, overcame its weak garrison, ate and drank in front of this chimney, and after a six hours occupancy returned to Canada, carrying away such booty as they could.

In December of that year the British and their Indians devastated the entire American shore of our river both by fire and the sword. Of nearly four hundred buildings on our frontier, outside of Fort Niagara, (which they had captured, and of course held,) but five buildings escaped the flames. When they had passed Fort Schlosser nothing but this chimney remained.

In 1839 General Peter B. Porter bought from Peter Grimard a considerable tract, embracing the site of Fort Schlosser. In 1840 he erected a large frame house, with a one story stone wing, which latter adjoined this chimney. In that house, as a child, the writer lived for more than a year. It stood until about 1880; when it was torn down, a huge stone bake-oven which



OLD CHIMNEY IN 1858
Drawn by Col. Peter A. Porter for Lossing the Historian

stood at the east end of the first story of the main house was taken down, but the old chimney was left intact.

A few years later the Niagara Falls Power Co., bought that land and when, in the course of its developments, it became necessary to use the site of the Old Chimney for a new factory building, that company through its general manager, the late William B. Rankine, generously, purely in a spirit of historical sentiment, and at a large expense, offered to remove this relic to a position in one of its streets, where it would be free from further molestation. Everyone of its outside surface stones was carefully marked: loving hands took it down, and it was re-erected here in exact facsimile of its former shape and appearance. That Corporation has ever since received, and will always receive, the sincere thanks of the people, for having thus preserved this ancient landmark for the

benefit, not only the history of this locality, but also for that of the state and of the nation.

That chimney's story is an integral part, yes, almost an epitome, of the history of this Frontier, for the past 165 years. As a part, first of a French, then of a British, and then of a United States Fort it protected the commerce of the Niagara portage; which portage was so long the only gate-way therefor between the Atlantic coast and the regions of all the upper lakes: and alongside of it flowed for over half a century, the entire commerce of half a continent. Indian tribes have fought against one another, and savages have murdered and scalped white men, in its immediate vicinage. During three quarters of a century, absolutely all of the provisions, all of the clothing, all of the ammunition for the forts in the west, under three successive nations, passed beside it. As an evidence of the magnitude of that early western military commerce it is recorded that in 1764, 5,000 barrels of provisions alone were lying adjacent to this chimney, awaiting transportation up the lakes in row boats. And, by it, coming eastward, flowed during 60 years, a constant stream of peltries gathered all over the great north west, which aggregated three quarters of the enormous fur trade of North America. By it often in days of peace, not infrequently in days of war, numberless companies of soldiers, and often hostile armies, of France, of Britain, and of the United States of America have marched and camped.

It was built just before those troublesome days, when the elder Pitt, Earl of Chatham, rose to supreme power in Britain, and wrested Canada and the valley of the Mississippi from the control of the glittering court of King Louis of France. It was here when Pontiac's great conspiracy was at its zenith and by it then passed three separate expeditions for the relief of besieged Detroit. It sustained the life of its gar-

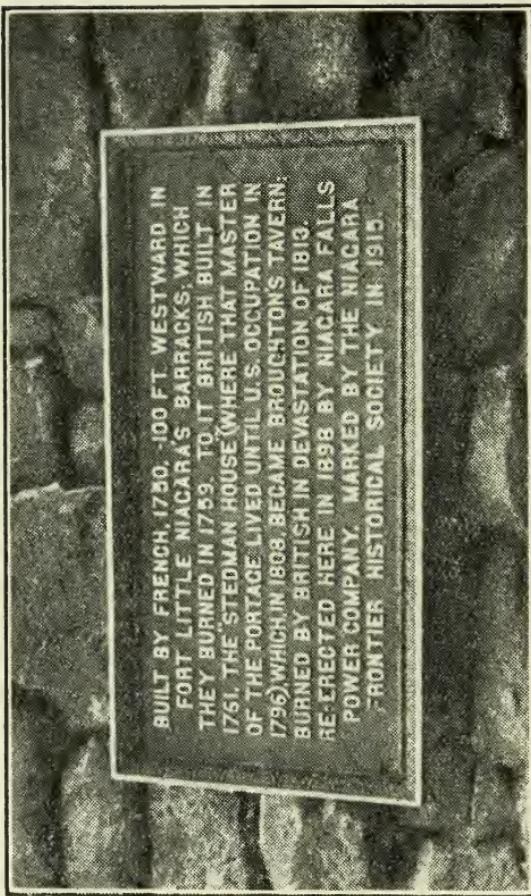
BURNING OF THE "CAROLINE" ON DECEMBER 29, 1837



risons in a fort, which insignificant in size and strength, was, because of its guardianship of one end of the indispensable Niagara Portage, the most important fort on North America, after Quebec and Fort Niagara. It was helping to feed British soldiers when the American Colonists were battling for their independence in the war of the Revolution. It has sheltered many a miserable white captive who warmed himself and ate a civilized meal before its fire place while his savage captors guzzled the white man's "fire-water."

It has seen its site pass from the control of France to that of Britain and from Britain to the United States. It played its part in the war of 1812, and for a second time survived the destruction of its fort. It was over four score years old when the Patriot Rebellion broke out and the steamer "Caroline" seized within its sight, was towed out onto the river, set on fire, and then cast adrift by its British captors, floated majestically by shrouded in flames amid the icy grandeur of that December night, on its way over the Cataract. It had long passed the Century mark when the troops of both the opponents in the Fenian Rebellion marched by on the opposite shore. It was hoary with age, when it witnessed the construction of the great Tunnel and saw the subsequent phenomenal developments all around its site of Electrical Niagara. It stands to-day as one of the few remaining monuments of French occupation in the country; a surviving witness of that famous struggle in the 18th Century between France and England for the possession of this New World.

Surely, we do right to treasure it and to suitably inscribe it.



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